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Senator Leahy Discusses C.I.A. Role in Foreign Policy

By Curtis G. Hler

Senator Patrick Leahy, (D-Vt.), gave the keynote address of the three-day conference sponsored by Political Forum entitled, "The Role of the C.I.A. in U.S. Foreign Policy," on Feb. 8. Leahy, who currently serves on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, spoke about the importance of congressional oversight of intelligence operations.

Leahy began by correcting common misconceptions of the C.I.A., including the misconception that congressional scrutiny has impaired the effectiveness of the intelligence services. Without the scrutiny, he claimed, "we could return to the days when the C.I.A. was called a 'rogue elephant' for abuses and actions contrary to this country's basic values." Leahy discussed the importance of intelligence to our foreign policy, saying that arms agreements would be worthless without intelligence capabilities.

Leahy expressed concern for the Reagan Administration's emphasis on the use of covert action. The C.I.A. should be an active instrument of foreign policy, according to the Senator, and covert action should in some cases be used when it is "essential to our interests."

However, Leahy said that the United States should pursue its goals through the channels of diplomacy when possible, and make less use of clandestine operations.

Leahy then briefly described the functions of his committee. The committee hears reports of proposed covert action, although it has no power to do anything besides offering opinions. However, he said the Administration does often take the committee's advice.

A major problem lies in the fact that members of the committee are overworked, Leahy said. He proposed that members be excused of other Senate duties, to devote more time to monitoring all aspects of intelligence. He also said that the C.I.A. should appoint a special liaison official who would consult with the committee on emerging intelligence issues, so that it could play an active role in the early stages of intelligence operations.

Leahy was pessimistic that either idea would be seriously considered, but he said he hoped that members of the committee could "press harder for information, be more inquisitive, and, most important, demand better accounting and justification." He concluded his talk by praising the intelligence agencies, but noted that there

is room for improvement.

In answer to one of the questions posed in the discussion period which followed, Leahy gave several examples of acceptable covert actions, including monitoring Soviet radio frequencies, helping defectors come to the United States, and acting to rid the Defense Department of Soviet infiltrators.

Other activities of the three-day conference included a panel discussion, a lecture, and a documentary film on the C.I.A. entitled, "On Company Business." Included in the panel discussion were Lee Strickland, associate general counsel of the C.I.A.; Daniel Hoffman, professor of political science at the University of Vermont; and David Rosenberg, associate professor of political science. The lecture, entitled, "The Role of the C.I.A. in U.S. Foreign Policy," was given by John Kelly, co-editor of Counterspy magazine.

The events of the three-day forum represented a wide range of views on the C.I.A. Kelly called for the abolition of the agency, saying that he believes it represents only the interests of corporate executives. In contrast, Strickland said that, at worst, the agency was "too subservient to Presidents, some of whom have found covert action a seductive tool."